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BRAHMS PIANO QUINTET CLIFFORD CURZON BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

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LEGENDARY PERFORMANCES

BRAHMS: QUINTET IN F MINOR FOR PIANO AND STRINGS, OP. 34

CLIFFORD CURZON, Piano

THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

Joseph Roisman, Jac Gorodetzky, violins;
Boris Kroyt, viola; Mischa Schneider, cello

Side 1

Allegro non troppo (11:27)

Andante un poco adagio (8:23)

Side 2

Scherzo (7:30)

Finale: Poco sostenuto (10:42)

(Recorded in 1950.)

One of the most complex, beautiful and powerful of all Brahms' works is the *Quintet in F Minor for Piano and Strings*, his only composition for this combination of instruments. It was, according to Daniel Gregory Mason in his book *The Chamber Music of Brahms*, "one of the slowest of all Brahms' works to win recognition; undoubtedly it is one of the hardest of them all to understand. . . . The composer himself had even more than his usual trouble in getting it into final and satisfactory shape. He wrote it first, in the early sixties, before going to Vienna to live, as a string quintet with two cellos. This form failing to give him the almost orchestral sonorities the musical ideas require, he turned it into the *Sonata for Two Pianos* that still exists as *Opus 34b*. When Clara Schumann insisted, however, that it imperatively demanded string tone, he set to work again to produce the version we know, in which the rhythmic incisiveness of the piano is happily combined with the singing powers of the bowed instruments."

When he wrote the *Quintet*, Brahms had not yet attained his thirtieth birthday. At this time he was often in a black mood, for the premiere of his *First Piano Concerto* in 1859 had been a fiasco, and he was still smarting from the failure. "Alas," he wrote in a letter to Clara Schumann, "how difficult every-

thing still is to me. When one . . . feels as feeble as I do, one is glad to lock oneself up and stare at the walls in despondency . . . and rail against all the ugly sounds and the boredom and one's halting artificiality and coldness of inspiration." Gloomy as these years may have sometimes been, they were wonderfully productive, for out of them came not only the *F-Minor Quintet*, but the *First String Sextet*, the *Handel Variations* for solo piano and the *Schumann Variations* for piano duet as well.

The *Quintet* is, on the whole, a transitional work. It has been suggested that here, perhaps for the first time, is Brahms the Romantic Classicist who was to turn from Schumann to Haydn and the early Beethoven in his affinities.

And yet the Romantic elements are strong in this work. There is, for example, the profusion of thematic material. The first movement alone contains four contrasting themes, while the *Scherzo* is built out of three. There is the storm and stress of the first movement, with the seemingly ceaseless conflict between passion and austerity, tenderness and defiance. The trio of the *Scherzo* is a gloriously lyric melody that, in Clara Schumann's opinion, turned out "rather too short." The fascinating last movement begins with an introduction filled with mystery and intensity and sadness. The main body of the movement seems to Brahms' biographer Walter Niemann jovial and boisterous, full of "ironically mocking laughter," but there are listeners who hear in this music profoundly disturbing tragedy. Pure beauty is to be found in the second movement of this splendid work. Here all is repose and simplicity and quiet meditation.

Clifford Curzon has been acclaimed as being "among the greatest keyboard artists of the time" by the *New York Times* and "a magnificent and extraordinary artist" by the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. Born in London, Curzon was the

youngest pupil ever admitted to the Royal Academy there. In time, he also studied with Artur Schnabel in Berlin and with Wanda Landowska and Nadia Boulanger in Paris. He made his American debut in New York in 1939, but returned to England at the outbreak of World War II. In 1947, he made his second American debut, this time with Dimitri Mitropoulos and the New York Philharmonic. Since then, Curzon has toured North America regularly, playing with major orchestras, in solo recital, and on nationwide radio programs such as the *Telephone Hour*. His performances are consistently marked by "greatness of a kind that is forgotten today" (*New York Times*).

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The Budapest Quartet is one of the most distinguished chamber-music ensembles of our time. Organized in Budapest, Hungary, in 1921, it inaugurated in that year a series of European and international tours which rapidly established its reputation in a dozen countries. The Quartet was first heard in the United States during the music season of 1930-31.

The comments of a music critic of the *New York Times* are typical of the reception that has been accorded the Budapest Quartet wherever and whenever it has appeared: "If there is a finer string quartet in existence than the Budapest Quartet, it has not made itself known on this side of the Atlantic. Here is a Quartet unrivaled for balance and blending of suave, soulful and immaculately pure tone, which achieves a unity of effect that could hardly be bettered and brings a poetry and understanding to its interpretations unmatched by any other organization of its kind today."



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BRAHMS:
QUINTET IN
F MINOR FOR
PIANO AND STRINGS,
Op. 34 (Beginning)
CLIFFORD CURZON. Piano. with
THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

32 16 0173 **SIDE 1**
MONO **32 16 0173-1**

Joseph Roisman, Jac Gorodetzky, Violins;
 Boris Kroyt, Viola;
 Mischa Schneider, Cello

1. I - Allegro non troppo
 2. II - Andante un poco
 adagio

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ODYSSEY **COLUMBIA**

BRAHMS:
QUINTET IN
F MINOR FOR
PIANO AND STRINGS,
Op. 34 (Conclusion)
CLIFFORD CURZON, Piano, with
THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

32 16 0173 **SIDE 2**
MONO 32 16 0173-2

Joseph Roisman, Jac Gorodetzky, Violins;
Boris Kroyt, Viola;
Mischa Schneider, Cello

1. III - Scherzo
2. IV - Finale: Poco sostenuto

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